

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER  
LISTED

JAN 17 2007

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name Mullen Court Apartments

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 1140-1150 N. Topeka Avenue [ N/A ] not for publication

city or town Wichita [ N/A ] vicinity

state Kansas code KS county Sedgwick code 173 zip code 67214

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  
[ ] nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the  
National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In  
my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be  
considered significant [ ] nationally [ ] statewide [ ] locally.  
(See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ].)

Patricia Palmer DSHPO  
Signature of certifying official/Title

12/6/06  
Date

Kansas State Historical Society  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria.  
(See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ].)

Signature of certifying official/Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date

[ ] entered in the National Register  
See continuation sheet [ ].

[ ] determined eligible for the  
National Register  
See continuation sheet [ ].

[ ] determined not eligible for the  
National Register.

[ ] removed from the  
National Register

[ ] other, explain  
See continuation sheet [ ].

Mullen Court Apartments  
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## 8. Statement of Significance

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### Applicable National Register Criteria

☐ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history

☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

Property is:

☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ **B** removed from its original location.

☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.

☐ **D** a cemetery.

☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ **F** a commemorative property.

☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

### Areas of Significance

Architecture

### Periods of Significance

1949

### Significant Dates

1949

### Significant Person(s)

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Muller, J.B. (builder)

Lamb, J.C. (builder)

## Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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## 9. Major Bibliographic References

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### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

#### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

# \_\_\_\_\_

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

# \_\_\_\_\_

#### Primary location of additional data:

☐ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State Agency

☐ Federal Agency

☐ Local Government

☐ University

☒ Other:

Name of repository: Department of Special Collections, Ablah Library, Wichita State University; Wichita Public Library

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**Mullen Court Apartments  
Sedgwick County, KS**

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**SUMMARY DESCRIPTION STATEMENT**

The Mullen Court Apartments, located at 1140-1150 North Topeka Avenue, Wichita, Sedgwick County, Kansas is a two-story brick apartment building with a C-shaped plan. It is located in an urban neighborhood approximately one and one-half miles north of downtown Wichita. Situated on the east side of Topeka Avenue, the building's front elevation and courtyard face west. A paved parking area for apartment tenants abuts the rear (east) elevation. East of the parking area, a gravel alley runs north-south. The building's buff-colored brick walls rest on a concrete foundation. A flat, asphalt roof covers the building. The simple brickwork, clean lines and flat roof of the Mullen Court Apartments convey the building's Moderne styling. It retains integrity of location and setting, its character defining stylistic elements, and materials from its period of significance.

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION**

**SETTING**

The Mullen Court Apartments is located just south of the National Register-listed Topeka-Emporia Historic District in one of Wichita's older, close-in residential neighborhoods. To the north of the nominated property are single family homes. A variety of commercial buildings and multi-family housing characterize the area to the south, west and east. Several blocks to the southeast is St. Francis Hospital. A vacant lot adjoins the north property line and a multi-family apartment building of more recent construction occupies the lot immediately to the south. One block to the west is a fast food restaurant.

Topeka Avenue, which runs in front of the building, is a one-way street with traffic flowing to the south. It has two wide lanes and accommodates parallel parking on both sides. Concrete curbs and sidewalks flank the grass easement strip that separates the road from the buildings. Two concrete walks lead from the public sidewalk into the courtyard formed by the C-shaped plan of the Mullen Court Apartments. In the courtyard the walks split to access each of the building's eight entrances. One leg of the walk extends through the arched opening at the center of the building to the parking lot in back.

**EXTERIOR**

The main block of the Mullen Court Apartments measures approximately 180 feet long. Arms extend west from the main block approximately 90 feet, turning back to the north and south approximately 52 feet to form the symmetrical C-shaped plan. Brick wing walls extend six feet into the courtyard from the inner corners of the C. The wing walls terminate in brick posts with limestone caps.

The building's buff brick walls rise to a clean, simple cornice that features two corbelled courses capped by a course of rowlock bricks. Small blocks of limestone terminate the rowlock course at each corner. An arched passageway at the center of the main block provides access from the front courtyard to the rear of the building. Metal gutters and downspouts on the rear (east) elevation provide roof drainage. Non-historic wood structures with asphalt shingled shed roofs cover the basement windows on the north and south ends of the building.

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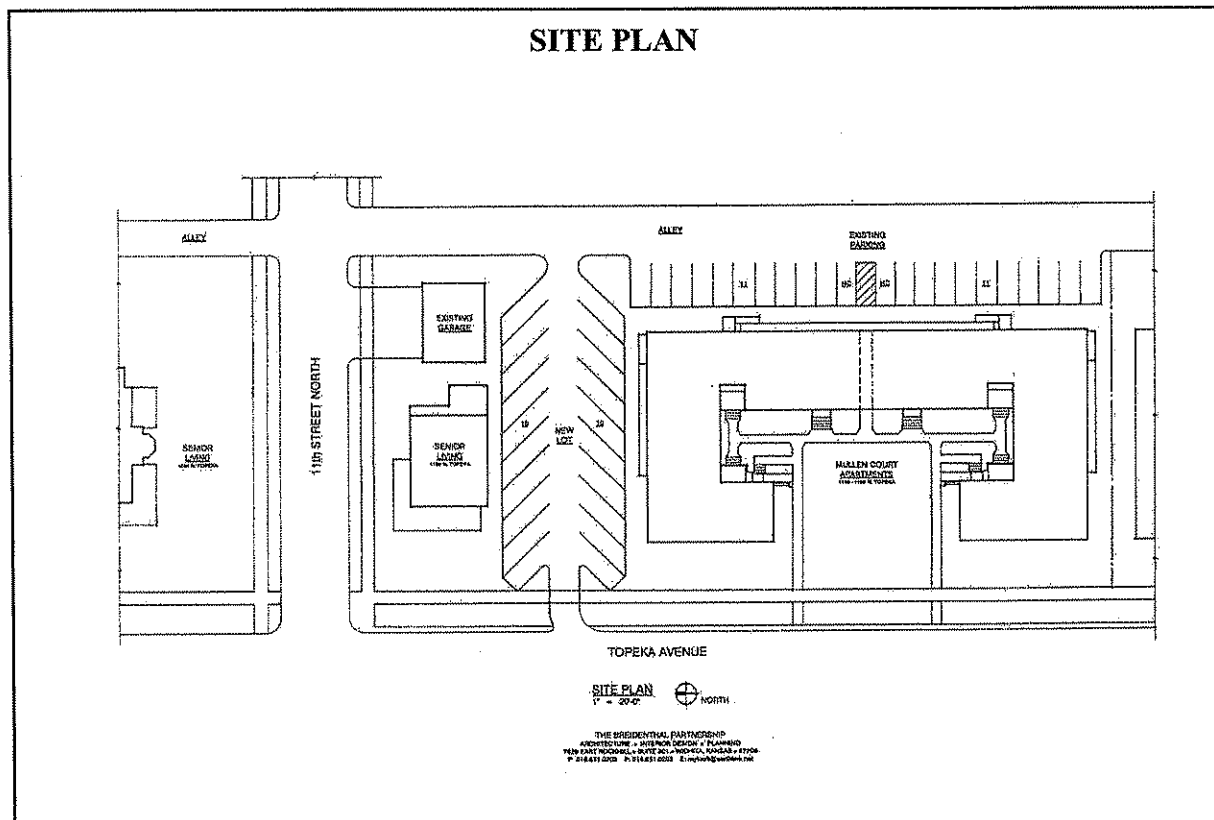
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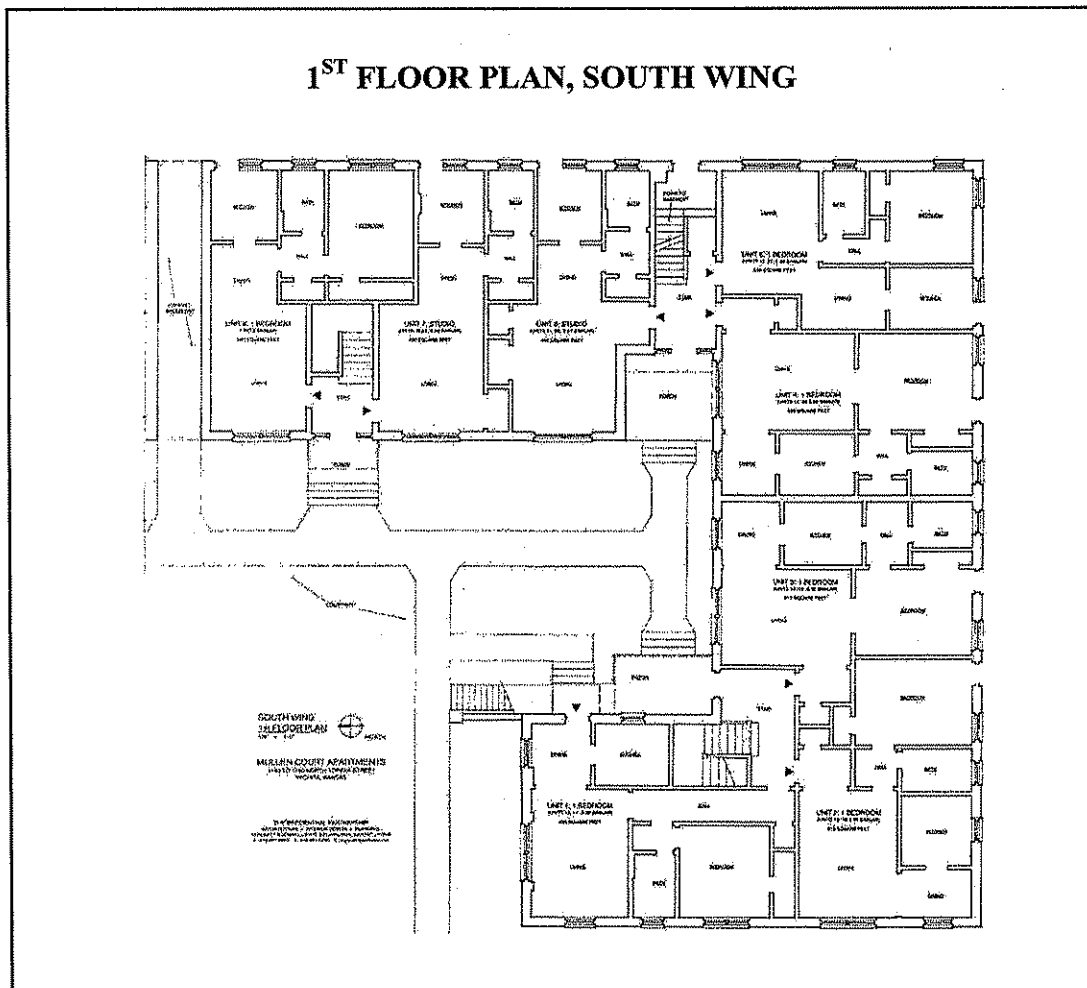
The apartments are configured as studio and one-bedroom units. Carpet and sheet vinyl cover the floors. Walls and ceilings are plaster. Window and hallway door openings are uncased. Within the units narrow molded wood trim frames doorways to rooms and closets. A short wood base defines the floor-wall junction. Most apartments feature a built-in linen closet near the bathroom. Some apartments retain multi-light French doors between the living room and the bedroom.

**INTEGRITY**

The Mullen Court Apartments retains a very high degree of integrity, including the majority of features that define its multi-family residential function and Moderne architectural style. The most notable alteration was the addition of through-wall heating/cooling units below many of the windows on all four elevations. While this resulted in the removal of historic fabric (brick), it did not alter any character-defining features of the building and does not impact the visitor's understanding of the building's historic use or design. Some of the original front doors have also been replaced, although the arrangement and configuration of openings remains unchanged. The entrances in the west elevation of the main block retain their original glass block sidelights and all of the porches retain the original metal lattice porch posts.



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### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Mullen Court Apartments, 1146-1150 North Topeka Avenue, Wichita, Sedgwick County, Kansas is locally significant under National Register Criterion C for the area of ARCHITECTURE. Constructed in 1949, it is a highly intact example of a multi-family residence built in Wichita in the Moderne style. J.B. Muller and J.C. Lamb erected the Mullen Court Apartments for local apartment developer/manager Mrs. Eva Mercer Gilham. Both its location in one of Wichita's older, center city residential neighborhoods and its architectural style reflect the trend of new apartment construction to accommodate Wichita's rapidly growing population during this period. The buff brick walls, low horizontal form, glass block sidelights and horizontal muntins convey the building's Moderne styling. The period of significance for the Mullen Court Apartments is 1949, the year of its construction.

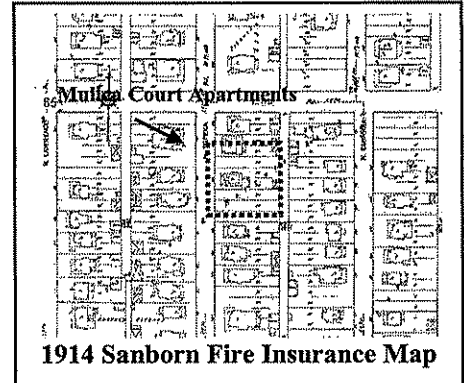
### ELABORATION

#### PROPERTY HISTORY

The Mullen Court Apartments occupies five lots on the east side of North Topeka Avenue, immediately south of the National Register-listed Topeka-Emporia Historic District. The District is significant for its collection of single-family and multi-family dwellings constructed between 1885 and 1935.<sup>1</sup> In 1903 a rambling, single-family house was located at 1148 North Topeka Avenue. Like most of its neighbors, it occupied a double lot. One vacant lot separated it from the neighboring house to the north and three vacant lots separated it from its neighbors to the south. By 1935 the house at 1148 North Topeka Avenue had been demolished, leaving eight contiguous vacant lots between the single family houses at 1128 North Topeka Avenue and 1154 North Topeka Avenue.

Although single family residences constitute the primary property type in the Topeka-Emporia Historic District, during the 1930s developers began erecting new multi-family apartment buildings in the area and large single family homes were converted to apartments, flats or rooming houses. In 1935 the streetcar line along Topeka Avenue that serviced the neighborhood was discontinued and the area's character began to change as upper-middle class residents began moving to suburbs that were easily accessible to downtown by automobile.

The trend toward multi-family housing in this vicinity continued after World War II. The 1951 Sanborn Map depicts seven apartment buildings on the 1100 block of North Topeka in addition to the Mullen Court Apartments. All were much smaller than the Mullen Court Apartments, and the footprints depicted on the map suggest that they were converted single family dwellings. The Sanborn Map also shows five modern apartment complexes located within a three block radius of the Mullen Court Apartments.



<sup>1</sup> Except where noted, information about the development of the neighborhood surrounding the Mullen Court Apartments comes from Deon Wolfenbarger, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form "Topeka-Emporia Historic District [preferred]," December 2003, Section 8. Wichita-Sedgwick County Metropolitan Area Planning Department, City Hall, Wichita Kansas.

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City services were stretched to their limits and providing housing for new residents became a priority. The federal government helped the city address the problem by constructing 400 single-family houses in the new Hilltop Manor subdivision in 1941 and by designating Wichita as one of 146 "defense areas" nationwide. This recognition of Wichita's vital role to the wartime economy encouraged private construction by making no-down-payment loans available through the Federal Housing Administration. During the 1940s, the City of Wichita issued residential building permits for \$105 million of new construction. Over one-fifth of that amount, \$22 million, occurred in 1949, the year that the Mullen Court Apartments were constructed.<sup>5</sup> By 1950, the number of residential units in Wichita constructed during the previous decade exceeded the number of existing dwelling units constructed prior to 1920, confirming the rapid pace of construction during this period.<sup>6</sup>

Efforts to house Wichita's rapidly growing population resulted in the development of several new residential subdivisions, most located on the outskirts of town in the vicinity of the new factories, as well as the construction of multi-family housing, mostly in existing neighborhoods. New apartment buildings were erected and large single family houses were converted to house multiple tenants. The 1940 city directory lists 224 apartment buildings in Wichita. This number grew by 69 percent to 326 apartment buildings, including the Mullen Court Apartments, in 1951. A 1954 city planning document identified 25 percent of Wichita's housing in 1950 as multi-family buildings with three or more units. An additional 15 percent of the city's housing that year was duplex dwellings.<sup>7</sup> The older neighborhoods closest to downtown Wichita had the highest percentage of rented dwelling units and the greatest number of multiple family dwellings.<sup>8</sup> Located just north of downtown, the neighborhood surrounding the Mullen Court Apartments experienced both the construction of new apartment buildings and the conversion of single family homes to apartments during this period. The Mullen Court Apartments is an excellent example of this activity.

#### ARCHITECTURE

Prior to World War II eclectic revival architectural styles dominated residential building design in Wichita and nationwide. Both single-family houses and multi-family apartment buildings adopted forms and facades that reflected the traditional building styles of Europe and Colonial America. Through the early 1940s, the textured walls and complex gables of English Tudor houses or the symmetrical facades and classical ornament of Colonial Revival residences were typical features of residential buildings. By the late 1920s, however, elements of European Modern Movement began finding their way into American architectural design. The Modern Movement was functional and efficient, and by the mid-1940s, American architects frequently adapted aspects of Modern Movement design for new multi-family residential construction.

One popular Modern Movement variant was called Moderne. Moderne buildings were sleeker than their predecessors. They incorporated smooth wall surfaces, curved corners, minimal ornament, and low, horizontal massing in an effort to emulate the streamlined industrial designs popularized by automobiles and airplanes.<sup>9</sup> The low, boxy buildings frequently utilized newly developed, prefabricated building materials, such as plywood and drywall, which gave them a more-uniform appearance. Interior layouts also reflected a more-practical approach to

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<sup>5</sup> Long, 186.

<sup>6</sup> Donald O. Cowgill, *A Pictorial Analysis of Wichita* (Wichita, KS: The Community Planning Council & University of Wichita, 1954), 19, Local History Collection, Wichita Public Library, Wichita, KS.

<sup>7</sup> Cowgill, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 98,100.

<sup>9</sup> Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 465.

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The *Wichita Beacon* mentioned Eva Mercer again in 1941 in conjunction with her remodeling of the Cubana Apartment Hotel, at the northwest corner of Main and English Streets.<sup>14</sup> Federal funds were allocated to Mrs. Mercer for the Cubana Apartment Hotel renovation to help accommodate Wichita's fast-growing population. The article in the *Wichita Beacon* described the building as having twenty-six of the most modern apartments in Wichita. The *Beacon* considered the opening of the Cubana to be "among the more important recent housing developments in Wichita." The finishes, furnishings and fixtures employed the most modern technologies and materials.

A 1949 article in the *Wichita Eagle* announced Mrs. Mercer's purchase of property for \$180,000 at 409-425 Broadway for a new building.<sup>15</sup> Around that year Eva Mercer also married Gayland Gilham, a salesman for a roofing, siding and insulation company. They lived in the building at 411 Broadway until 1950 when they moved into the Mullen Court Apartments. In 1959, the city directory once again lists "Mrs. Eva Mercer," suggesting that she and her second husband were no longer married.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Edward N. Tihen's Notes from Wichita Newspapers, *Wichita Eagle*, 18 November 1949, 1, Department of Special Collections, Ablah Library, Wichita State University, Wichita, KS.



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- Polk's Wichita (Sedgwick County, Kansas) City Directory 1970*. Volume LXXV. Kansas City, MO: R.L. Polk & Company, 1970. Department of Special Collections, Ablah Library, Wichita State University, Wichita, KS.
- Sachs, David H. and George Ehrlich. *Guide to Kansas Architecture*. Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1996.
- Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of Wichita, Kansas, 1903*. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1903. Database online. Available at <http://proxy.kclibrary.org:2269/ks/3114/dateid-000006.htm> Internet; accessed 1 March 2006.
- Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of Wichita, Kansas, 1914*. Volume 2. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1914. Database online. Available at <http://proxy.kclibrary.org:2269/ks/3114/dateid-000007.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 March 2006.
- Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of Wichita, Kansas, 1935*. Volume 1. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1935. Database online. Available at <http://proxy.kclibrary.org:2269/ks/3114/dateid-000008.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 March 2006.
- Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of Wichita, Kansas, 1935*. Volume 1. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1935 corrected to 1950. Database online. Available at <http://proxy.kclibrary.org:2269/ks/3114/dateid-000009.htm>; Internet; accessed 1 March 2006.
- Wolfenbarger, Deon. National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form "Topeka-Emporia Historic District [preferred]." December 2003, Section 8. Wichita-Sedgwick County Metropolitan Area Planning Department, City Hall, Wichita Kansas.

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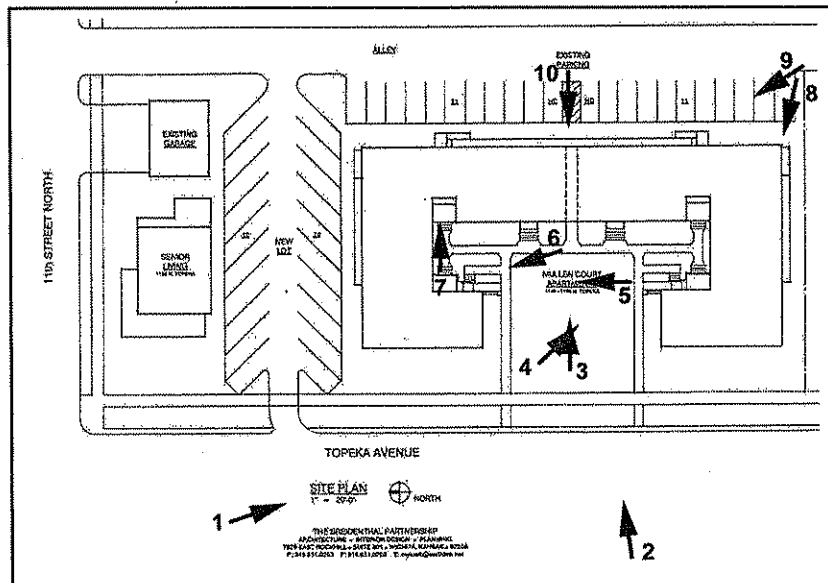
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PHOTOGRAPH LOCATION MAP

EXTERIOR VIEWS



TULLEN COURT  
 4 PARTMENTS  
 '40-1150 N.  
 TOPEKA AVE.  
 WITH  
 EDGWLK COY  
 KANSAS  
 'TM:  
 1/646855/  
 7174251

